

AMENDMENT

Please amend the claims as follows:

1. (Previously Presented) A method of providing a customer with information regarding a product, the method comprising:

receiving an electronic request for information for a product;

searching an electronic database to determine if the electronic database contains information for the product;

if the electronic database contains information for the product, sending an electronic message to the customer containing selected information from the electronic database that corresponds to the product; and

if the electronic database does not contain information for the product, automatically sending an electronic request to a sourcing agent to perform a search outside of the electronic database to gather information for the product which gathered information is returned to the customer in an electronic message and added to the electronic database.

2. (Original) The method as recited in claim 1, wherein requesting a sourcing agent to perform a search comprises forwarding the electronic request to the sourcing agent as a request for quotation.

3. (Previously Amended) The method as recited in claim 2, wherein the request for quotation is prepared by the customer in response to a prompt that is automatically sent to the customer when the electronic database does not contain information for the product.

4. (Original) The method as recited in claim 1, wherein the electronic request is received via the Internet.

5. (Previously Amended) The method as recited in claim 1, wherein the electronic request is forwarded to the sourcing agent via an email.

6. (Currently Amended) The method as recited in claim 1, comprising comparing the electronic request against a set of predetermined rules to determine the sourcing agent to which the electronic request ~~for quotation~~ is to be routed; and automatically routing the electronic request to the sourcing agent determined to be appropriate by the step of comparing, the sourcing agent performing a search to find a source for the product specified in the electronic request.

7. (Previously Amended) The method as recited in claim 6, wherein the step of comparing comprises comparing words in the electronic request against a set of predetermined product descriptors to determine a type of product specified in the request.

8. (Previously Amended) The method as recited in claim 6, further comprising the step of preparing an email that includes information representative of the electronic request.

9. (Currently Amended) A computer-readable medium having instruction for sourcing a product, the instructions performing steps comprising:

receiving an electronic request specifying a product;

searching an electronic database to determine if the electronic database contains information for the product;

if the electronic database contains information for the product, sending an electronic message to a message recipient containing selected information from the electronic database that corresponds to the product; and

if the electronic database does not contain information for the product, automatically comparing the electronic request against a set of predetermined rules to determine a sourcing agent to which the electronic request is to be routed; ~~and routing the electronic request for quotation to the sourcing agent determined to be appropriate by the step of comparing where the sourcing agent performs a search outside of the electronic database to find a source for the product specified in the request for quotation;~~ receiving an electronic message from the sourcing agent including information for the product from the source; and automatically updating the electronic database with the information for the product from the source.

10. (Previously Amended) The computer-readable medium as recited in claim 9, wherein the instructions perform the further step of sending the source for the product specified in the request as determined by the sourcing agent to an originator of the request.

11. (Previously Amended) A method of providing a customer with information regarding a product, the method comprising:

receiving an electronic request for information for a product;

searching an electronic database to determine if the electronic database contains information for the product;

if the electronic database contains information for the product, sending an electronic message to the customer containing selected information from the electronic database corresponding to the product; and

if the electronic database does not contain information for the product, performing a search outside of the electronic database to gather information for the product, sending the gathered information in an electronic message to the customer, and adding the gathered information to the electronic database.

12. (Previously Amended) A method of providing a customer with information regarding a product, the method comprising:

receiving an electronic request for information for a product;

searching an electronic database to determine if the database contains information for the product;

if the electronic database contains information for the product, sending an electronic message to the customer containing selected information from the electronic database corresponding to the specified product; and

if the electronic database does not contain information for the product, providing the customer with an option to authorize a further search outside of the electronic database to gather information for the product which, if authorized, causes the performing of the further search, the returning to the customer in an electronic message the gathered information, and the adding of the gathered information to the electronic database.

13. (Previously Amended) An electronic commerce system, comprising:

an electronic catalog having product information;

a first component that accepts an electronic request for quotation for a product not contained within the electronic catalog, the first component automatically routing the request for quotation to a sourcing agent determined by the first component to be appropriate for finding a source for the product not contained within the electronic catalog; and

a second component that allows a user to search the electronic catalog to gather information for a selected product and that automatically provides access to the first component if the electronic catalog does not contain information pertaining to the selected product.

14. (Original) The system as recited in claim 13, wherein the electronic catalog and second component reside on a Web server of a third party vendor.

15. (Original) The system as recited in claim 13, further comprising a portal through which the electronic catalog, first component and second component are accessible.

16. (Original) The system as recited in claim 13, wherein the electronic catalog, first component and second component reside on a single Web server.